

2 days left to Christmas

Happy Holidays



On The News Email: news@arubatoday.com Website: www.arubatoday.com Tel: 582-7800 Thursday, December 23, 2010

Iraqi churches cancel Christmas festivities



In this Dec. 10, 2010 photo, an Iraqi police officer stands guard outside Our Lady of Salvation church in Baghdad, Iraq. Since the Oct. 31 bloodbath in their Baghdad church, Iraqi Christians are fleeing from Sunni Muslim extremists who view them as nonbelievers and agents of the West. At a time when Christians in various parts of the Muslim world are feeling pressured, Iraqi Christians are approaching their grimmest Christmas since the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 and many are fleeing north to the safer Kurdish region of Iraq.

Associated Press
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President Barack Obama signs the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010, Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2010, during a ceremony at the Interior Department in Washington. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of Calif. is at center, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nev. is at right.

(AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

Obama signs 'don't ask, don't tell' repeal

By PAULINE JELINEK,
Associated Press

WASHINGTON – President Barack Obama signed a new law Wednesday that will allow gays for the first time in history to serve openly in America's military. And he urged those kicked out under the old law to re-enlist.

Framing the issue as a matter of civil rights long denied, Obama said that "we are a nation that welcomes the service of every patriot ... a nation that believes that all men and women are created equal."

Repealing the 17-year-old policy known as "don't ask, don't tell" in a ceremony that was alternately emotional and rousing, the president said "this law I'm about to sign will strengthen our national security and uphold the ideals that our fighting men and women risk their lives to defend."

The new law ends a policy that forced gays to hide their sexual orientation or face dismissal. More than 13,500 people were discharged under the rule since 1993.

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Dad, son sentenced to death in Oregon bank bombing



SALEM, Ore. — A jury Wednesday sentenced a father and son to death for planting a bomb that exploded inside an Oregon bank two years ago, killing two police officers and maiming a third. In a trial that spanned three months, prosecutors portrayed Bruce and Joshua Turnidge as bigoted men who hated authorities, were desperate for money and feared that newly elected President Barack Obama would take away their guns. Both defendants stood with their lawyers and stared straight forward, showing no emotion as Marion County Circuit Judge Tom Hart read the jury's verdict. Sheriff's

deputies handcuffed them with their hands in front of their bodies.

The same jury convicted the men Dec. 8 on 18 counts each of aggravated murder and other charges in the December 2008 bombing at a bank in Woodburn.

"This is a murderer with no remorse," prosecutor Matt Kemmy said in his closing argument of the penalty phase Tuesday.

Both men have maintained their innocence. Father and son turned on each other in trial, each pointing the finger at the other for building and planting the bomb.

Prosecutors urged jurors to sentence the men to

death to prevent them from endangering prison staff or preaching their hatred for authorities to young prisoners who will someday be released. As convicted cop killers, the Turnidges will be popular in prison, they said.

Witnesses testified that Bruce Turnidge, 59, had previously hatched detailed plans to kill people he didn't like and once fantasized about killing then-President Bill Clinton. Prosecutor Courtland Geyer told jurors that a death sentence would mean "safety from crimes that lurk inside the mind of Bruce Turnidge." Prosecutors portrayed Joshua Turnidge, 34, as selfish and hostile to jail staff.

Jail staff testified that the younger Turnidge made rude, "hateful" and disrespectful comments that resulted in him losing privileges, the Salem Statesman Journal reported.

Jail Sgt. Megan Gonzalez said Joshua Turnidge drew a swastika over a U.S. flag on a postcard that shows the jail facility and wrote other things including "pigs for sale!" "human rights?" and "gas chamber" on the card before trying to send it. The postcard was deemed a violation of

policy.

According to testimony, father and son exulted in the Oklahoma City bombing, and Bruce Turnidge viewed Timothy McVeigh as a hero. Defense attorneys said the men would want to behave well in prison so they could continue seeing visitors. Evelyn Knight, Bruce Turnidge's mother and Joshua's grandmother, testified that a death sentence would be devastating for Joshua's 12-year-old daughter, who is in the custody of her grandparents.

"No child should be left without a parent," defense attorney Steven Gorham said in his closing argument. "Not the survivors' children, not Joshua Turnidge's children." The defense also argued that the Joshua Turnidge would not be revered in prison but rather reviled as a snitch for testifying against his father. The men were convicted after prosecutors argued that the Turnidges had fantasies of building bombs, robbing banks and starting an anti-government militia. They hatched the bank robbery plan because they needed money to keep their struggling biodiesel company afloat, prosecutors

said.

Witnesses testified that Bruce Turnidge, who grew up in a farming family in the Willamette Valley but could not make a go of farming himself, wanted to live in a tent city with people who shared his political beliefs but couldn't get money to build an arms stockpile for a militia.

Bruce Turnidge did not take the stand, but family members denied he hated police or held extremist political views.

Joshua Turnidge testified that he bought two cell phones and materials used to build the bomb without knowing his father planned to use them to rob a bank. He said he only figured out what happened after hearing his father muttering that no one was supposed to get hurt.

The death sentence will be automatically appealed to the Oregon Supreme Court, starting a judicial review that could last decades.

Since 1962, only two condemned inmates have been executed in Oregon both were men who gave up their appeals. The state has 34 men on death row, including some who were sentenced more than 20 years ago. □

Texts, Web really do allow Santa to be everywhere

PHILADELPHIA — He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake, and he knows how many followers you have on Twitter. Not long ago, there were two ways to tell Santa Claus what you wanted for Christmas: sitting on his lap or writing a letter. Now, like with just about everything else, St. Nick is available by text or e-mail, Twitter or Facebook. Kids can watch his worldwide journey online or take a phone call. Santa Claus is truly everywhere. And just as unfettered access sometimes tempts adults to lose their cool on e-mail listservs or Facebook comments, spoiled kids can be tempted to flame out on Santa.

"Some people have texted Santa that aren't so happy with Santa," said Drew Olanoff, who plays Santa on a text messaging system. "They've

been a little rude. I've let them know that would be considered bad behavior. You really shouldn't talk to Santa like that."

The increased use of electronic services to reach Santa Claus reflects another reality of life outside the North Pole. Some major post offices, including Philadelphia, say they're handling far less mail directed to him. Chicago has handled about 10,000 letters to Santa this year, down from 15,000 to 20,000 in 2009.

So tech services are finding they can get a promotional boost from Kris Kringle without renting a red suit and a white beard. Most of them are in their first few years and use the gimmicks to show the power of their technologies.

Portable North Pole, a project launched by Montreal-based video web developer UgroupMedia, sends kids

personalized videos from Santa even those who deserve a lump of coal. Tell the site your kid hasn't been so good, and the video Santa peers over his glasses and tells the child: "You're on my naughty watch."

Another site, TextSanta.net, expects to send out close to 100,000 texts this year.

T.J. Kirgin Jr., CEO of the 2-year-old texting operation and also leader of an advertising firm in St. Charles, Mo., said the idea is to be greener not generating all those paper letters and to raise money for charity. From every \$3.99 text, \$1 is donated to the March of Dimes.

Kirgin said it's a thrill for children not just to write to Santa, but to hear from him.

"One parent said (his son) was so excited that he got a text message from Santa that he actually peed his pants,"



Kirgin said. The child then feared that Santa would be upset at him for not being a "big boy."

The parents had Santa send another text to tell him it was OK. Sue Wangler, a grandmother who lives in Maryland Heights, Mo., has been using the service to have Santa send texts to her granddaughter and some other young friends for three years. She said the messages are helpful for her granddaughter

and a close friend, both 9, who have been wondering whether Santa's real. "This text from Santa has prolonged the belief system a little longer," she said. Gogii, a mobile application development firm in Marina del Rey, Calif., for which Olanoff plays Santa, has an irreverent take on children's Christmas lists. Olanoff posts some requests on his blog at textingsantaclaus.com, along with some cheeky responses. □

Storm causes hillside collapse, flooding in SoCal

LAGUNA BEACH, Calif. — A powerful storm dumped more rain on already waterlogged Southern California on Wednesday, washing hillsides onto highways, endangering houses in canyons and forcing rescuers to pluck dozens of motorists from flooded streets. The storm was expected to ease as it moved eastward. Floodwaters washed away homes in Arizona, and inundated parts of Nevada and Utah.

The low-pressure system could be in New Mexico by Thursday and could reach the Gulf Coast by Saturday with some rain, but not the deluge that hit Southern California, forecasters said.

In Southern California, the burst of heavy rain in the morning left streets flooded and caused minor mudslides. The threat, however, of larger mudslides could last for weeks in the suburban Los Angeles canyon hillsides laid bare by wildfires.

"The ground is so saturated it could move at any time," said Bob Spencer, spokesman for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works. Spencer added that catch basins designed to hold a landslide's uprooted trees and other debris before it can wash down onto homes appeared to have plenty of capacity.

Heavy rains early Wednesday caused a hillside to collapse on part of a busy Interstate 10 transition road about 30 miles outside Los Angeles.

In eastern Orange County, 25 to 30 people were evacuated from their homes in Silverado Canyon. The houses were threatened by rolling boulders and debris flow. The canyon is on the edge of the Cleveland National Forest that burned in a 1997 wildfire.

Silverado Creek was swollen with muddy brown water and roads were choked with mud and uprooted trees.

Orange County Fire Authority Capt. Larry Kurtz said firefighters walked residents to a church and searched deeper in the canyon for remote homes. "If we have any more rain, there are people who just can't get out," Kurtz said.

Paul Wright, whose best friend died in an Orange County mudslide in 1997, said he was awakened by the sound of rolling boulders at 3 a.m. and hurried to get his family out of his home.

"There's huge, big boulders, 'Boom! Boom!,'" he said. "I lost my house in the Laguna mudslide, so I'm erring on the side of caution."

Wright and his dog, Joe, waited outside a grocery store to be evacuated. Wright said he hoped to join his wife and two young children who already fled to a nearby church.

Some residents refused to leave.

Rick Tallant said he has lived in the canyon for nine years and planned to wait out the rain at his home.

"I didn't leave during the fire three years ago and I'm

not going to leave now just because it's wet," he said. "I'm probably just going to go home and sit and stay dry." In the towns of Laguna Beach and adjoining Laguna Woods, rescuers plucked more than 30 drivers, pedestrians and people stuck in their homes as mud and stormwater poured down steep hillsides.

"There's mud and rocks and hillside collapses," Laguna Beach police Lt. Jason Kravetz said. "It was too much (rain), too quick."

One man was rescued from his house after a mudslide pushed in one of the walls, he said. About a square mile of Laguna Beach, including downtown, was closed as up to 4 feet of water rolled down the streets from Laguna Creek. The water later receded but left an mushy carpet of mud. Officials on Tuesday ordered evacuation of 232 homes in La Canada Flintridge and La Crescenta, suburbs of Los Angeles below steep hillsides



that burned in 2009 and where mudslides inundated homes and backyards in February. The area is where the Station Fire charred 250 square miles above suburbs tucked below the San Gabriel Mountains. Olivia Brown, 45, left her Paradise Valley home in the La Canada Flintridge area around midnight.

"I'm worried about a rock coming down on the house," Brown said at a Red Cross shelter. "My husband stayed home with two of our dogs. He had to be a man, you know, and hold down the fort. When

he's nervous, it makes me nervous. I had to go."

Brown also was afraid that if she stayed home there might be road closures that would prevent her from visiting her daughter, who gave birth to her first grandchild at a hospital on Tuesday evening. "Had it been the 1960s or 1970s, I guess we would have named him Raindrops or Stormy," she joked. "He's got a regular name."

"We'll be bringing home a baby for Christmas. Hopefully, we'll be back by then," she added. □

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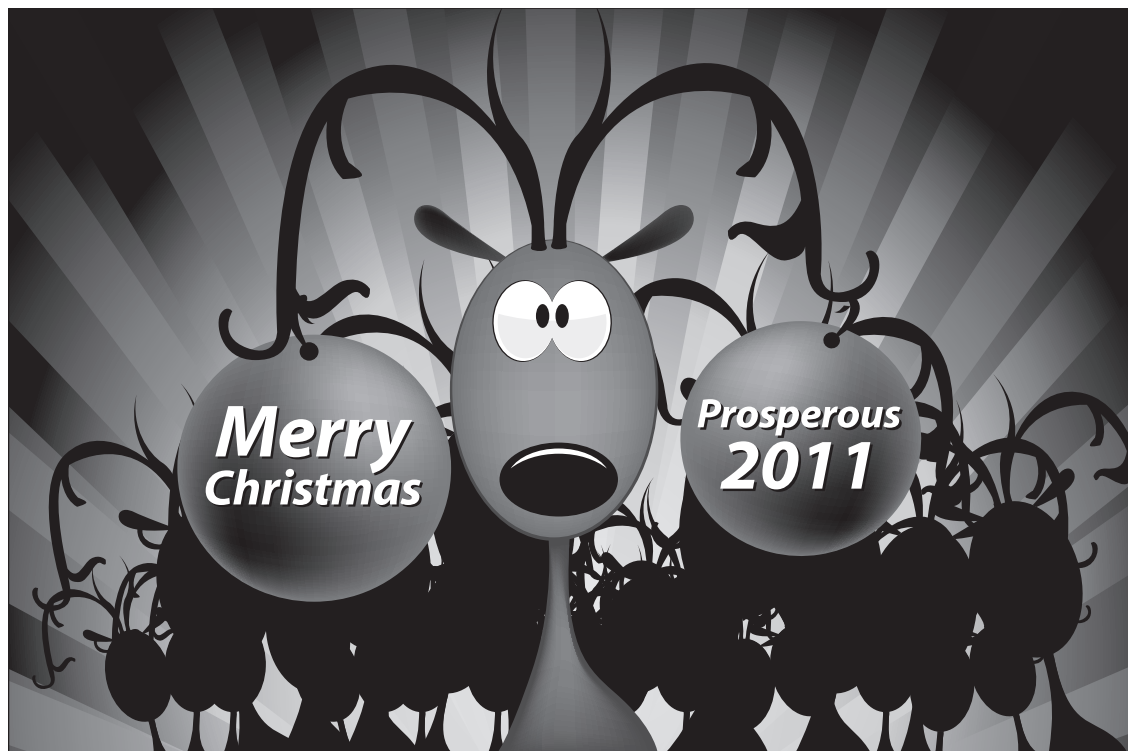
ANNOUNCEMENT

Post Aruba N.V. would like to inform all the clients that in connection with the Christmas Holidays all their offices will be closed on December 24th, 2010.

On December 27th, 2010 all our offices will operate with its normal business hours.

Management and staff would like to wish you a Merry Christmas.

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Kennedy cousin lawyer heading to prison over taxes



HARTFORD, Conn. — An attorney who represented Kennedy cousin Michael Skakel in his murder trial was sentenced Wednesday to one year and one day in federal prison for failing to pay about \$420,000 in income taxes. Michael “Mickey” Sherman, who has appeared frequently on national television shows as a legal analyst, had pleaded guilty in June to two misdemeanor counts of willful failure to pay income taxes. He admitted he could have paid the taxes, but spent the money on country club

memberships and other lavish expenses. Prosecutors said Wednesday he has repaid \$400,000 but still owes about \$1.2 million in taxes, penalties and interest from 2001 to 2009. Sherman was ordered to cooperate with the Internal Revenue Service on a plan to repay those debts as part of his sentencing Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Bridgeport. Messages left for Sherman and his defense attorney, William Dow III, were not immediately returned. Dow previously had said that Sherman filed accurate

returns but failed to pay the taxes because he had “substantial personal and family obligations and was focusing on his practice,” which included the high-profile Skakel case. Skakel, a nephew of Robert F. Kennedy’s widow, Ethel Kennedy, was convicted in 2002 in the 1975 fatal beating of his neighbor in Greenwich when they were both 15. Skakel is serving 20 years to life in a state prison. Sherman will be assigned to a yet-undetermined federal facility when he starts his sentence March 16.

Services held for slain border patrol agent

DETROIT — U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano vowed Wednesday to seek “swift justice” for bandits who engaged border patrol agents in a gun battle that killed Michigan native Brian Terry. Napolitano, the top government official attending services for Terry at Greater Grace Temple in Detroit, described him as an exceptional agent who cared deeply about those serving with him. “He put service before self, which is the mark of heroism,” Napolitano told Terry’s loved ones and dozens of law enforcement officers from agencies across the country and neighboring

Canada. The 40-year-old agent was shot to death while tracking an organized gang Dec. 14 in an Arizona canyon just north of Mexico. Four bandits were arrested. Others are being sought. Napolitano had said shortly after Terry’s death that the bandits tracked by his team typically rob drug smugglers or illegal immigrants making their way into the U.S. We resolve ... I resolve to pursue swift justice for those responsible for his death,” Napolitano said. Terry joined the Marines after graduating from Flat Rock High School in 1988. He followed his three-year military career with stints

with police departments in Ecorse and Lincoln Park, outside Detroit. Terry, a member of the elite Border Patrol Tactical Unit BORTAC once wrote that he didn’t fear death because he had “been close enough to it on enough occasions.” His fear was the loss of honor, Michigan State Police Sgt. Dan Bowman read from notes Terry had written about himself. Terry had written that he would “rather die fighting than to have it said that I was without courage.” The Justice Department, FBI and Mexican authorities are working together to weed out the remaining suspects from the attack, said Alan Bersin,



U.S. Customs and Border Protection commissioner. “The people who murdered him will be brought to justice. Make no mistake about that,” Bersin said during Wednesday’s services. “They can run, but they cannot hide.” Terry is survived by his mother, father, a brother and two sisters. □

Skakel’s current attorney, Hope Seeley, has said Sherman’s financial difficulties resulted in the defense not having enough money to investigate the case before the 2002 trial. Sherman has denied that. Skakel is appealing his conviction based on that argument and others. He already has lost two appeals before the Connecticut Supreme Court, but his latest points to several instances in which the high court criticized Sherman’s handling of the case. Sherman, who could have received up to two years in prison for the tax charges, also represented former Connecticut Gov. John G. Rowland in a corruption scandal that sent Rowland to federal prison for 10 months. Sherman’s ex-wife accused him last year of failing to pay \$16,000 monthly alimony, instead leading a high life of luxury vacations, expensive hotels and restaurants, costly entertainment, dues at exclusive country clubs and pricey clothing. In 2007, Sherman’s law firm partner, Joseph Richichi, was sentenced to 16 months in prison for failing to pay more than \$600,000 in taxes. Richichi blamed his own failing health and Sherman saying Sherman incurred more than \$1.1 million in federal tax liens on the property they owned, bounced checks and failed to pay back \$25,000. Richichi loaned him to build a house. □

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DON'T ASK DON'T TELL

Continued from Front Page

"I hope those ... who've been discharged under this discriminatory policy will seek to re-enlist once the repeal is implemented," Obama said.

"I hope so too," agreed Zoe Dunning, a former naval officer now with the advocacy group Servicemembers Legal Defense Fund.

"We are in two wars and we need qualified candidates," Dunning said after the ceremony. She said it was unclear how many discharged under the old law might seek to rejoin and whether all "have completely healed ... trust the military is going to treat them fairly."

The question of reinstating those previously discharged was addressed in a months-long study done by the Pentagon earlier this year on how the armed forces might go about implementing a repeal of don't ask don't tell.

The study recommended that the Department of Defense issue guidance to all the service branches permitting those previously separated on the basis of homosexual conduct "to be considered for re-entry, assuming they qualify in all other respects."

It said the fact that they were kicked out for gay conduct should not be held against them but added that if they received an "other than honorable" discharge for accompanying reasons, those reason should be considered.

A beaming Obama signed the bill at the Interior Department, a location chosen to accommodate a larger than normal audience for a bill signing.

"I say to all Americans, gay or straight, who want nothing more than to defend this country in uniform, your country needs you, your country wants you, and we will be honored to welcome you into the ranks of the finest military the world has ever known," Obama said.

"No longer will tens of thousands of Americans in uniform be asked to live a lie, or look over their shoulder in order to serve the country that they love," Obama said.

As military leadership and advocacy groups have warned

in recent days, Obama also noted that the repeal will not immediately go into effect until the government goes through additional steps to roll back the old policy.

Gay troops would still be vulnerable to being discharged until Pentagon officials first complete mandatory implementation plans — and the president, defense secretary and chairman of the joint chiefs certify to lawmakers that the move won't damage combat readiness, as critics charge.

Speaking to reporters later in the day, Obama said he spoke to the military service chiefs about readiness after Congress voted for repeal.

"They have all said that we are going to implement this smartly and swiftly, and they are confident that it will not have an effect on our military effectiveness. So I'm very heartened by that," Obama said.

Opponents of the repeal have argued the move would harm unit cohesion, could prompt some to leave the services or not to sign up in the first place and remain a distraction at a time when the armed forces are fighting two wars.

But Obama said: "We are not going to be dragging our feet to get this done."

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said Obama thinks actual implementation of the new law will be "a matter of months."

Pentagon personnel chief Clifford Stanley and his staff have already started working to put together an action plan based partly on recommendations from the study.

The plan will look at a host of questions, from how to educate troops on the change to how sexual orientation should be handled in making barracks assignments.

The president vowed during his 2008 campaign to repeal the law and faced pressure from liberals who complained he was not acting swiftly enough.

For Obama, it was the second high-profile bill signing ceremony within a week following Friday's signing into law a tax package he negotiated with Republicans that extended Bush-era tax



President Barack Obama signs the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010, Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2010, at the Interior Department in Washington.

(AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

rates for two more years, cut payroll taxes and ensured jobless benefits to the unemployed for another year. The two events, however, could not have been more

different in tone. The tax deal divided Democrats and forced Obama to accept extensions of tax cuts for the wealthiest, a step he had promised to not take.

With Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell at his side during that bill signing, Obama seemed dutiful and subdued. □

WISHING YOU THE HAPPIEST OF HOLIDAYS!

The Airport Branch will be closed on the following dates:



Friday, December 24, 2010: Closed at 11:00 AM
Saturday, December 25, 2010: Closed
Sunday, December 26, 2010: Closed

Friday, December 31, 2010: Closed at 11:00 AM
Saturday, January 1, 2011: Closed

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Parents of NJ student who killed himself may sue



NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. – The parents of a Rutgers University student who killed himself after his roommate allegedly used a webcam to spy on him during a tryst with another man have filed notice that they intend to sue the school. Joseph and Jane Clementi, parents of Tyler

Clementi, filed notice Friday preserving their right to sue. They have to wait six months after the notice to file a lawsuit over their son’s death, which became a symbol in a national outcry over the bullying of young gays. In the notice, the couple said “it appears Rutgers University failed to act, failed to put in place and/or failed to implement, and enforce policies and practices that would have prevented or deterred such acts, and that Rutgers failed to act timely and appropriately” The claim, first reported by The Home News Tribune of East Brunswick, did not list how much in damages the

Ridgewood family would seek. The notice was given shortly before a 90-day deadline, and the family has not decided whether to move ahead with the lawsuit, Paul Mainardi, a Clementi family lawyer, said in a statement. Without the notice, he said, the family would lose the option to sue. Rutgers spokesman E.J. Miranda said in a statement that the school is not to blame. “We at the university share the family’s sense of loss of their son, who was a member of our community. We also recognize that a grieving family may question whether someone or some institution could somehow have responsibility

for their son’s death,” Miranda said. “While the university understands this reaction, the university is not responsible for Tyler Clementi’s suicide.” Clementi, an 18-year-old violinist in his first weeks of college, killed himself on Sept. 22, days after a roommate and another Rutgers allegedly used a webcam to peek at Clementi’s liaison with another man. The suspects, Dharun Ravi and fellow freshman Molly Wei, were both charged with invasion of privacy and have withdrawn from Rutgers. Authorities say they’re weighing whether to charge them with bias intimidation.

Clementi’s death came amid a string of high-profile suicides of young people who were gay or perceived to be gay. Partly because of the way he killed himself jumping off the George Washington Bridge connecting New Jersey with Manhattan Clementi has become a face of the issue. Some experts fear that his death may have sparked copycat suicides among other vulnerable young people. President Barack Obama and celebrities including talk show host Ellen DeGeneres have talked publicly about his death and said that young gays and lesbians need to know that life gets better. □

Vigilantism discouraged in Philly strangler search

PHILADELPHIA – A serial killer who police say sexually assaulted and strangled three women, and possibly attacked three others, in a neighborhood rife with drugs and prostitution might want to hope that authorities find him before the neighbors do. Residents of Kensington, who once severely beat a suspected rapist based on a police photo, have posted hundreds of comments and theories about the case on a Facebook page titled “Catch the Kensington Strangler, before he catches someone you love.” One post that falsely identified a suspect led to an angry crowd outside the man’s home. Fearing vigilantes, he called police who later cleared him, and then scolded residents. “We will not tolerate anyone taking vigilante action,” Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey warned. “If you see someone suspicious, call 911. We will get there. We will handle.” Police on Tuesday linked a third slaying to a predator who they say

raped, beat and strangled two women over the past few weeks. Three other women have reported being sexually assaulted; two of them said they were choked into unconsciousness. So far, police only have a composite sketch and grainy surveillance photo of a possible suspect; \$37,000 in reward money is being offered. Once a middle-class neighborhood of rowhomes a few miles northeast of downtown, Kensington has become a high-crime area with a culture of open-air drugs and prostitution. But it also boasts a nascent gentrification effort as young homeowners and artists move in, attracted by the affordable prices. Lifelong resident Edward Neisser, 62, angrily blamed the neighborhood’s ills on too many halfway houses and abandoned, overgrown properties. “It’s a disgrace what’s going on around here,” Neisser said. “The city could turn around and clean up these lots so none of this stuff happens.” But Jayme Guokas, a relative newcomer, said he was unwilling to write off the neighborhood where he

has spent the past six years. “It’s one person who’s doing these things,” Guokas, a 35-year-old carpenter, said of the strangler. “That’s counteracted by a lot of working people who are trying to invest in the neighborhood and make it better.” Guokas lives a few doors down from where police found the body of 35-year-old Nicole Piacentini of Philadelphia on Nov. 13. Twenty-one-year-old Elaine Goldberg of Philadelphia had met the same fate 10 days earlier; the body of Casey Mahoney, 27, of East Stroudsburg, was found Dec. 15. The women, all of whom have been described as struggling with drug addiction, were found within 10 blocks of each other. And yet even with the murders, police said drug sales and prostitution continue unabated. “It is somewhat disturbing that, in light of all this information, all of this warning, that women and men are still frequenting this area and engaging in high-risk behavior,”



Deputy Commissioner William Blackburn said. Authorities have arrested 120 people involved in prostitution in Kensington since Nov. 19 and obtained DNA swabs from many of them, Blackburn said. More than 40 have been cleared, and tests are pending on the rest. □



Diplomats were leery of Allen Stanford

U.S. diplomats in the Caribbean were already wary of Texas financier Allen Stanford, who faces trial for allegedly leading a \$7 billion Ponzi scheme, years before he was detained in 2009 on massive fraud charges, a diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks shows.

The May 2006 confidential report from the U.S. Embassy in Bridgetown, Barbados describes Stanford as a "controversial Texan billionaire" and major investor in the Caribbean. It adds: "His companies are rumored to engage in bribery, money laundering, and political manipulation."

"Embassy officers do not reach out to Stanford because of the allegations of bribery and money laundering," said the cable, which recounted an Apr. 21, 2006 breakfast in Barbados in which U.S. Ambassador Mary E. Kramer met Stanford for the first time in what was described as a "chance encounter."

The cable made public this week, one of a stream of confidential and secret U.S. diplomatic cables being released by WikiLeaks in a major international embarrassment to the United States, showed that U.S. authorities were well aware of reports of financial irregularities surrounding Stanford, long before the fraud scandal broke in 2009. Stanford, a flamboyant, jet-setting billionaire and sports entrepreneur in the United States and Caribbean, is due to stand trial in a Texas court in January 2011. He denies any wrongdoing. One of Stanford's lawyers played down the comments made in the U.S. embassy cable. "Frankly, I don't see how this affects us one way or the other," Robert Scardino told Reuters. □

"RESPECT LIFE...always remember" foundation installed



ORANJESTAD - This past Friday, December 17th 2010, at the office of notary Ralph Yarzagaray, Fundacion RESPETA BIDA...semper corda, which translates to RESPECT LIFE...always remember, was officially installed as a foundation.

The main goals of the foundation are:

to safeguard the rights of every member of society in Aruba; promote tolerance, solidarity, freedom and equality of every co-citizen; fight specifically against practices of: racism, anti-semitism and xenophobia, which can rear their heads at any time.

The first board of directors of the

foundation consists of: Mrs. Diana Gonzalez-Pieters as president and Mr. Jose Fernandes Perna, vice-president; Mrs. Martha Goldenberg-Lichtenstein as secretary and Mr. Frank Williams, second secretary, Mrs. Shereen de Cuba as treasurer.

Continued on Page A10



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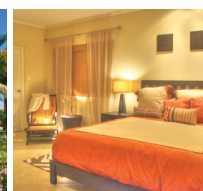


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The annual collection is on Thursday and Friday

The Clown Doctors of Aruba out in force at the supermarkets



ORANJESTAD - The annual collection for the Clown Doctors of Aruba, the foundation that brings smiles to the sick, handicapped and to the elderly on a weekly basis, is held on Thursday, December 23 and on Friday, December 24. Volunteers will be standing at the 'big' supermarkets with their collection boxes, hoping for a donation from the shopping public. The annual Christmas collection is one of

the major fund raisers; with these funds the clowns are paid for their work. Being a clown might sound easy, but it involves an enormous creative and improvisational effort and years of training. The Clown Doctors of Aruba can be found at the Dr. Horacio Oduber children's ward, at Bibito Pin, at Casa Cuna and at Maris Stella and Paviljoen, the homes for the elderly. Through the creation of a fantasy world,



the children and elderly are transported into a fun place for a while, which is beneficial to their healing process or to their state of mind. The clowns can tell amazing stories about their work and the results that are gained through their efforts. Please give a donation to the Clown Doctors; their work might not sound like serious business, but it works wonders. The volunteers will be collecting money at Superfood Supermarket, Ling & Sons, Kong Hing and Certified Supermall from 10 am until 8 pm on Thursday and from 10 am until 1 pm on Friday. Thank you! ☐



For lunch and dinner!

Amazing Restaurant in San Nicolas is open



SAN NICOLAS - Amazing Restaurant, with its amazing choices and ample portions, located in San Nicolas, will be open for lunch and dinner, starting

Tuesday, December 21. The popular restaurant is expecting lots of patrons to come by for a spectacular and very affordable treat. The restaurant is located



in the Van Zeppenfeldstraat 15, in the front part before one reaches the Mainstreet; it is known for its excellent kitchen and most reasonable prices. □

Palm Beach boasts authentic Mediterranean cuisine



By ARUBA TODAY

PALM BEACH -- When we say Mediterranean cuisine, we mean the food from the adjacent nation-states sharing the shores of the Mediterranean, embracing many cultures and influenced by varied customs.

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We discovered that the chefs choose the best, most delicious dishes from France, Italy,

Greece, and Tunisia, and paired them with most famous Middle-Eastern appetizers and salads to present a formidable culinary trip around the Mediterranean Sea, enjoyed in the contemporary indoor dining room which includes a cozy lounge area or on the dining terrace overlooking the action at the new bustling Palm Beach Plaza.

Spanokopitakia, brick oven baked filo pastries filled with Greek cheese and spinach, famous Tzaziki, a yogurt and cucumber dip, and popular Babaganoush and Hummus, with authentic pita bread, are some of the most popular appetizers.

For main courses our traditional Moussaka is justly called, the best you

will ever have, and the genuine Tunisian Couscous, loaded with merguez, chicken and lamb, is rivaled only by the Tenderloin, Lamb and Chicken kebabs. Casa Tua pays homage to provincial



cooking with our Grilled Whole Red Snapper, flavored with herbs de Provence, and our Mussels, taste the way they're served in the port of Marseille. Our thin crust Italian Pizza, needs no introduction, as it has earned a huge following in both the other restaurants, Casa Tua Pizzeria and Casa Tua Barcelona.

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“RESPECT LIFE...always remember” foundation installed



Continued from Page A7

Mrs. Doina Eman, as official godmother of the foundation, acts as the protector of Fundacion RESPETA BIDA...semper corda. All fundraising efforts for the project will be in the hands of David Cybul and Marlon Pieters.

The Anne Frank Statue.

The first project spearheaded by Fundacion RESPETA

BIDA...semper corda is to place a statue of Anne Frank at the park that is located in front of Juliana School and Reina Beatrix School. The foundation chose Anne Frank as a commemorative symbol to always remember that a holocausto can happen again, if a community does not know how to co-exist peacefully.

The life that Anne Frank had to experience as a child

during the Second World War is well known, thanks to her personal diary. Anne Frank's personal diary was titled “Het Achterhuis” and was translated into more than 70 languages, and recently also into Papiamentu.

Fundacion RESPETA BIDA...semper corda is convinced that Anne Frank as a symbol will be able to inspire every human being, old and young, to always be alert against any kind of discriminatory manifestations.

Specific Programs.

Fundacion RESPETA BIDA...semper corda wants to realize its goals through a series of activities and programs, such as:

a. Continuously raising awareness in the community in its entirety about the necessity of solidarity, tolerance and mutual respect among every citizen in Aruba;

b. Organize community get-togethers and direct constructive dialogues, hereby contributing to an Aruba where a better human understanding and a more

harmonious life are created;

c. Execute educational projects, especially for the youth, about the possible consequences of any type of discrimination or stigmatization of groups and at the same time, promote a spirit of respect and peace for every human being.

Fundacion RESPETA BIDA...semper corda wants to approach organizations and groups that share the one similar philosophy of working together for the good of Aruba. Fundacion RESPETA BIDA...semper corda is registered at the Chamber of Commerce and will initiate its projects in the near future.

To be able to realize its projects, the Board of Directors of Fundacion RESPETA BIDA...semper corda is making an appeal to the community and to the generosity of each and every one of us for a financial contribution. The Board of Directors has authorized Marlon Pieters and David Cybul as volunteers to collect donations for the foundation. Prime Minister Mike Eman inspired by Anne Frank. Prime Minister Eman has a lot of sympathy for Fundacion RESPETA

BIDA...semper corda and the goals that the foundation

wants to realize for the community of Aruba.

Prime Minister Eman was inspired by the statue of Anne Frank in Costa Rica during his visit when he was representing the Dutch Kingdom.

During this occasion the Prime Minister was informed by the Ambassador of the Dutch Kingdom in Costa Rica about an avenue that was dedicated to Peace. At the Avenue of Peace the Prime Minister discovered the Anne Frank statue that was created by the Dutch sculptor Joep Coppens. This was enough reason for Prime Minister Eman to pay a visit to both Mr. Joep Coppens as well as the Anne Frank House museum.

Meanwhile, right here in Aruba, Prime Minister Eman was able to inspire some local citizens who were willing to organize activities and programs, similar to those in Costa Rica, thereby focusing on the protagonist role of Anne Frank.

Several representatives of the group of concerned citizens took the initiative to create a foundation that was made official on the 17th of December 2010 under the name Fundacion RESPETA BIDA...semper corda, or Foundation RESPECT LIFE...always remember. □

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The Radisson Casino hosts first successful slot tournament



PALM BEACH – The Casino at the Radisson enjoyed a busy Slot Tournament on Saturday when more than 60 avid slot players came to compete for cash prizes. At the end of a fun, heated race three cash prizes were won by Denis Yee, Mireya Melo and Davy Jamin who proudly posed for a picture with the casino tournament hostess. While slot fever was raging hotel guest James Strauss played one of the casino’s loose poker machines for a

lucky \$4,000 jackpot. The casino at the Radisson will be hosting the slot tournament again on Saturday at 9 p.m. A special Pre-Christmas Poker Tournament will unfold on Thursday, December 23rd starting at 7 pm. Century Casinos, Inc. which recently announced a management contract for the casino at the Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa, recently took over the lively gaming floor, which overnight filled with patrons from the resort and



from neighboring hotels, enjoying nightly promotions and fun events. □



Would you like to adopt me?

Krocket on the look-out for friends & family members



We would like to introduce Thunder to you, one of the donkeys living at the Aruban Donkey Sanctuary. Krocket was found wandering in San Nicolas, together with

his mother and some other donkeys, when he was just one year old. As traffic is a killer, Krocket had to be caught; he had been injured already. That injury, a large, gaping

wound, had probably been caused by dog bites. As soon as Krocket came to us, we took him to the vet. There he was anaesthetized and his wound was stitched up. Krocket needed the anaesthesia, because he was wild indeed. And that wildness stayed even when he was recovering from his injury until he was put together with donkey Mocca. That turned out to be a golden choice, because Mocca protected Krocket and that was what the one-year old needed among such a large herd of donkeys. Mocca and Krocket have been inseparable ever since and together they enjoy life to the fullest.

Krocket has a chip, just like the other donkeys. This way he can be recognized and all his medical information is on it. The donkeys at the shelter are well-cared for: they get their food and drink and when they are sick the vet is called. Yes, they are expensive customers. The volunteers try to cover the cost through organizing all kinds of activities and by selling nice souvenirs in the store. Fortunately there are visitors who adopt a donkey now and then, who donate money or who buy something in the store. They help keep the shelter afloat that way. The volunteers of the shelter are now looking for people

who wish to adopt Krocket. He will stay at the shelter, of course; the only thing that is needed is that AWG. 30,-- per month is paid for his keep. In this way you help support this wonderful donkey as well as the shelter. You will receive a nice document and a super T-shirt. And if you like, your name and photo will be posted on our website. Please call the shelter at 595-2933 and become Krocket’s new family member; you can also register as an adoptive parent via our website www.arubadonkey.org or deposit a donation on our Aruba Bank account 40.03.025. Please help! □

Europe's Last Dictator Holds On to Power

WASHINGTON, DC – In Belarus, the man known as “Europe’s last dictator” secured reelection amid police crackdowns, sweeping arrests of opposition figures, and charges of election fraud. President Alexander Lukashenko looks like he will remain in power after 16 years of rocky and occasionally violent rule. At a news conference, Lukashenko responded to international condemnations of his handling of the election by saying “there won’t be any more muddle-headed democracy in the country.” The New York Times’ Michael Schwartz reports that, over the weekend, “thousands of people converged on Independence Square here in the capital, heeding opposition leaders who called the election a farce and accused Mr. Lukashenko of keeping the post-Soviet country locked in dictatorship.” They were “quickly overwhelmed” by “armored riot troops,” however, and even beaten by “packs of plainclothes officers.”

How has the situation in Belarus remained this bad? And where will it go from here?

What Comes Next? Reuters’s Lidia Kelly warns that rigging the election and suppressing protesters was the easy part for Lukashenko. “Bulging external deficits threaten the economic basis of Lukashenko’s 16-year-old grip on power, but he won a pre-election reprieve by patching up ties with former colonial master Moscow and winning a sweetheart deal on energy imports,” she writes. “Even if Lukashenko reckons he can get by without the European Union opening its checkbook, he has

no choice but to open up Belarus’s Soviet-style command economy to sustain his rule.”

How Belarus Got Us to Go Soft “Why has the West gone soft on Lukashenko?” The New Republic’s James Kirchick asks. “The answer, in fact, lies to the east: Belarus has increasingly become a pawn between Russia and Europe and the United States. And the winner of this geostrategic chess match has been the Belarusian dictator himself.” Kirchick tells the story of how Belarus went from heavily sanctioned pariah to tolerated chess pawn.

A Blight on Europe “Lukashenko’s continuing grip on power makes Belarus one of the last relics of Soviet-style dictatorship,” the Associated Press’s Yuras Karmanau and Maria Danilova write. “The country’s continuing repression has been an embarrassment to the European Union, which offered 3 billion euros (\$3.9 billion) in aid to Belarus if the elections were judged to be free and fair.”

Can Belarus Follow the China Model? The Guardian’s Andrej Dynko says Lukashenko is trying. “The country itself has changed a lot in 15 years, despite the dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenko. Its economy has grown at twice the rate of neighbouring Ukraine’s. This is a Chinese, or rather a Singaporean model-and Lukashenko is convinced it is the one best suited to the Belarusian mentality and geopolitical situation. Not everyone agrees with him, however. A parallel society has grown up: rock music, samizdat and discussion clubs are all flourishing.” □

The New Trend in Temporary Employment

WASHINGTON, DC – Many U.S. businesses, operating in a climate of economic uncertainty, are hiring more temporary workers but not offering them full-time positions, Motoko Rich of The New York Times reports. The trend raises concerns that the workplace is undergoing a structural transformation in which short-term employees becomes a more deeply rooted segment of the labor force. While temporary workers are in better shape than the unemployed, Rich explains, they often don’t enjoy the benefits, job security, and career development that full-time employees do, nor do they have as easy of a time saving money. Around a quarter of all jobs added this year by private sector employers were temporary positions, Rich notes, compared with 10.9 percent in the comparable period following the recession of the early 1990s and 7.1 percent following the economic downturn earlier this decade. Commentators are parsing

the findings in different ways: U.S. Is Following Japan Down a Troubling Road, states Yves Smith at Naked Capitalism.

Like America, Japan is experiencing the rise of “freeters,” or temporary workers, though, in Japan, the problem is primarily affecting college graduates. She continues: As with Japan, the long term implications of this trend are not good: employers providing lower-quality employment; workers attaining less in the way of skills, which puts them on a permanently weaker career path; the resulting lower income workers less able to build up economic reserves in an era of weakening safety nets ... With far fewer social inhibitions against turning employees into temps, we can expect to see an even further hollowing out of the US economy.

What Is Incentivizing Employers? “With temporary workers,” says Joel Mathis at Cup O’ Joel, “they get all the production but without the same levels of pay, and

certainly without having to pay so much for benefits ... The downside of that, of course, is that the economy won’t get moving again until people start wanting to consume again. If you’re in a ‘temp’ job, what will be your capacity or inclination to spend?”

Is This The New Normal? wonders William McKenzie at The Dallas Morning News: “I still would like to think that folks laid off in one industry could be retrained for a permanent job in another industry. But what if there just aren’t enough jobs to go around and you have to work in a short-term position or a series of short-term positions?”

Fear Over Temporary Workers Is Overblown, claims Daniel Indiviglio at The Atlantic. It’s normal for temporary workers to compose a large proportion of hires in the wake of a recession, Indiviglio explains, especially during this recession because it “was so long and so deep, and the recovery so fragile.” □

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HUMAN HINTS

Powerless Players

Why is it that techniques to create your own reality work only some of the time, if at all? Why is it that so few of us have actually found what we’re looking for? The bottom line that we don’t want to admit, is that we, the players in the game, do not hold the power to change our hologram.

We, the player in the game, cannot change the hologram, nor would we want to. Life would be unbearably boring without challenge and mystery. The game is to get lost in a realm of limitation, and find our way out. If we’re not lost and limited, we undermine the entire point of the game. We are not here to bypass the most brilliant game ever devised, we’re here to enjoy it.

We’ve been taught that to create your own reality, focus your thoughts, emotions and actions on what you want. This might appear to work sometimes, but it is certainly not always successful. When it does work, it only means that you want something that your expanded self has written into your story. Your desire of it does not matter. You will get what your expanded self has in store for you whether or not you try to manifest it.

As players in the game, the only power we hold is to let the hologram unfold moment by moment, without resistance or judgment. The way we interpret and react to the illusion defines our lives. When we reclaim our power from the illusion, we become indifferent to whatever the hologram shows us.

Robert Scheinfeld’s material goes into great detail about how to reclaim your power from the hologram so it no longer affects you. We’ll also continue to discuss it here.

Go to www.HumanHints.com to sign up to receive this column in your email each day.

~Quentin Danziger

Quentin has over 20 years experience balancing what we refer to as the Real World, with science and spirit. He has held positions of responsibility and authority, received a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Physics from Colorado School of Mines, and has studied many avenues of alternative thought. HumanHints is the culmination of his knowledge, experience and practice. These free daily emails detail concrete, real-world techniques to consciously create any future you chose, while in the throes of daily life created by outdated modes of thought. □



In this picture released by the Federal Tribunal of Cordoba, former dictator Jorge Videla, left, and former Army Gen. Luciano Benjamin Menendez listen to their sentences in court in Cordoba, Argentina, Wednesday Dec. 22, 2010.

By MICHAEL WARREN

Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — Former dictator Jorge Videla was sentenced to life in prison Wednesday for the torture and murder of 31 prisoners, most of whom who were “shot while trying to escape” in the months after his military coup.

The conviction was Videla’s first in 25 years for crimes against humanity, thrilling relatives who packed the courtroom, holding up grainy black-and-white pictures of the victims and shouting “murderers” at the defendants. Most of the two-dozen former military and police officials

Associated Press

Argentine ex-dictator Videla sentenced to life in prison

who were tried with Videla also received life sentences.

Videla, who led the military coup that installed Argentina’s 1976-1983 dictatorship, is considered the architect of a dirty war that eliminated thousands of people in a crackdown on armed leftist guerrillas and their supporters.

The judges found Videla “criminally responsible” for the deaths of the prisoners, who were transferred from civilian jail cells to a clandestine prison where they were repeatedly tortured under interrogation before being killed.

Videla told the court that Argentine society demanded

the crackdown to prevent a Marxist revolution and complained that “terrorists” now run the country.

Videla must serve his sentence in a civilian prison, the judges decided, ruling out the privileges he enjoyed after he was first convicted of crimes against humanity in 1985, as Argentina was struggling to return to democracy. Videla served just five years of a life sentence in a military prison before former President Carlos Menem granted him and other junta leaders amnesty.

After a concerted campaign to reform a judicial system packed with dictatorship-era judges, the Supreme Court overturned those amnesties in 2007, and current President Cristina Fernandez has encouraged a wave of new trials of former military and police figures involved in the clandestine torture centers where thousands of the regime’s opponents disappeared. This was the first of dozens of trials coming up for Videla, now 85.

Some of his co-defendants received lesser terms, and seven minor defendants whose

cases were joined to Videla’s were found not guilty.

It was the fifth life sentence for former Gen. Luciano Benjamin Menendez, who directed the early war against leftist subversives across much of northern Argentina. The 31 victims in this case — many of them university students with links to armed leftist revolutionary movements — were taken to a clandestine center in Cordoba and tortured with methods including electric shock, rape, simulated asphyxiation with water and nylon bags and mock executions. They were left naked in cold wet cells through the winter, and were told their families would be killed if they didn’t confess, survivors said.

Menendez told the court that it is historically revisionist to present armed leftist groups as passive victims with no responsibility for criminal acts. The Montoneros and the People’s Revolutionary Army were already committing violent acts before the coup, he reminded the judges.

“They were combatants who took on certain risks,” Menendez said. □



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Lady Luck is waiting for you at Excelsior Casino!!

Iraqi Christian churches cancel Christmas festivities

By YAHYA BARZANJI
SAMEER N. YACOB

Associated Press

KIRKUK, Iraq — No decorations, no midnight Mass. Even an appearance by Santa Claus has been nixed after Iraq's Christian leaders called off Christmas celebrations amid new al-Qaida threats on the tiny community still terrified from a bloody siege on a Baghdad church.

Christians across Iraq have been living in fear since the assault on Our Lady of Salvation Church as its Catholic congregation was celebrating Sunday Mass. Sixty-eight people were killed. Days later Islamic

insurgents bombed Christian homes and neighborhoods across the capital.

On Tuesday, al-Qaida insurgents threatened more attacks on Iraq's beleaguered Christians, many of whom have fled their homes or the country since the church attack. A council representing Christian denominations across Iraq advised its followers to cancel public celebrations of Christmas out of concern for their lives and as a show of mourning for the victims.

"Nobody can ignore the threats of al-Qaida against Iraqi Christians," said Chaldean Archbishop Louis Sako in Kirkuk. "We cannot



Iraqi women pass by a closed church in Baghdad, Iraq, Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2010. Church officials in Iraq say they have canceled some Christmas festivities in two northern cities over fears of insurgent attacks.



South Korean sailors work on their ships next to South Korean Navy's floating base near Yeonpyeong Island, South Korea, Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2010

Associated Press

S.Korea holds massive new drills after North attack

HYUNG-JIN KIM

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea on Thursday mobilized hundreds of troops, tanks, helicopters and jet fighters for a massive military exercise aimed at sending North Korea a message of strength amid high tensions on the peninsula.

The firing drills set for later in the day near the Koreas' heavily armed land border signaled that South Korea is willing to risk further escalating tensions with North Korea, which shelled a southern island off the Koreas' western coast on Nov. 23, killing four South Koreans and stirring fears of war.

The attack was portrayed by Pyongyang as a retaliation for southern military exercises on Yeonpyeong island that day.

South Korea has conducted 47 military drills this year similar to the one planned for Thursday, which was scheduled in response to the North Korean attack, an army officer said on condition of anonymity citing department rules. Thursday's drill will be the biggest-ever wintertime joint firing exercise that South Korea's army and air force have staged, an army statement said.

"We will completely punish the enemy if it provokes us again like the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island," Brig. Gen. Ju Eun-sik, chief of the army's 1st armored brigade, said separately.

South Korean forces are on high alert even though the North backed down from its threat to again retaliate over a separate firing drill the South held Monday on Yeonpyeong in disputed western waters. □

find a single source of joy that makes us celebrate. The situation of the Christians is bleak."

Church officials in Baghdad, as well as in the northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul and the southern city of Basra, said they will not put up Christmas decorations or celebrate midnight Mass. They urged worshippers not to decorate their homes. Even an appearance by Santa Claus was called off.

"It's to avoid any attacks, but also to show that people are sad, not happy," said Younadim Kanna, a Christian lawmaker from Baghdad.

Even before the Oct. 31 church attack, thousands of Christians were fleeing Iraq. They make up more than a third of the 53,700 Iraqis resettled in the United States since 2007, according to State Department statistics.

Since the church attack, some 1,000 families have fled to Iraq's safer Kurdish-ruled north, according to the United Nations, which recently warned of a steady exodus of Iraqi Christians.

The latest threats were posted late Tuesday by the Islamic State of Iraq, an al-Qaida front group, on a website frequented by Islamic extremists. The group said it wants the release of two women it claims are being held captive by Egypt's

Coptic Church.

Muslim extremists in Egypt accuse the Coptic Church of detaining the women for allegedly converting to Islam, an accusation the church denies.

The message posted Tuesday was addressed to Iraq's Christian community and said it was designed to "pressure" Egypt.

Few reliable statistics exist on the number of Christians remaining in this nation of 29 million. A recent State Department report says Christian leaders estimate there are 400,000 to 600,000, down from a prewar level of some 1.4 million.

For those who remain, Christmas will be a somber affair.

In the northern city of Kirkuk, 180 miles (290 kilometers) north of Baghdad, Sako said there will be no Christmas decorations outside churches and a traditional visit by Santa Claus has also been called off. Money usually used on celebrations or gifts will instead go to help Christian refugees.

Ashour Binyamin, a 55-year-old Christian from Kirkuk said he and his family would not go to church on Christmas and would celebrate at home. At Baghdad's Our Lady of Salvation Church, where more than 120 parishioners

were held hostage by gunmen during the four-hour siege, all Christmas Masses have been canceled. Only a modest manger display will mark the occasion.

"We have canceled all celebrations in the church," said Father Mukhlis. "We are still in deep sorrow over the innocent victims who fell during the evil attack."

In Baghdad's Karradah neighborhood, where many of the city's remaining Christians live, churches were guarded by security forces Wednesday and surrounded by razor wire. Shop owners said few people were buying the Christmas trees and Santa Claus toys on sale.

Ikhlas Bahnam, a Christian in the neighborhood, vowed to go to Mass on Christmas Day, despite what she called the government's failure to protect her small minority. But she won't be visiting friends during the holiday season because all of them have fled the city.

"We did not put any decorations inside or outside our house this year," Bahnam said. "We see no reason to celebrate."

In Mosul, 225 miles northwest of Baghdad, the Rev. Faiz Wadee, a Syrian Orthodox priest, said there will be no public Christmas celebrations there. □

French farmer jailed in shooting over truffles



In this Jan. 31, 2008 file photo, truffles are seen at the Aups truffles market, southern France. Police say they have arrested a 32-year-old farmer at Grignan, on the edge of France's famed Provence region who fatally shot with a hunting rifle a trespasser he suspected of trying to steal highly coveted truffles. The 43-year-old victim died shortly after the shooting Monday Dec. 20, 2010.

GREG KELLER

PARIS (AP) — French police have arrested a farmer who fatally shot a trespasser he suspected of trying to steal highly coveted truffles from his land on the edge of France's southern Provence region.

The 32-year-old farmer told authorities he was guarding his truffle patch in the town of Grignan when he was frightened by the intruder and shot him in the legs and head with a hunting rifle, police said Wednesday.

Associated Press

Police said the farmer believed the man was armed. The 43-year-old victim died shortly after Monday's shooting. Authorities did not release the names of either man.

Truffles are a fungus found mainly in forests in France and Italy that grow underground, in the root systems of host trees. They are prized for their rich, earthy flavors and can fetch astronomical prices — making them a prime target for thieves.

Didier Chabert, a local truffle-grower who has known the accused farmer for many years, said the man had already been hit by thieves two or three times this truffle season, which runs from December through March.

"At this time of year, the thieves are waiting for the moon to grow so there is light at night, the thief comes at that time to steal truffles," Chabert said.

French forests produce 50 tons of black truffles in a good year, but poor weather caused last year's harvest to drop to 25 tons, said Chabert, the former head of the local truffle-growers association.

Demand for truffles peaks at Christmas time, when the French traditionally splurge on delicacies such as truffles, champagne, foie gras, prawns and oysters. Last year black truffle prices reached \$600 a pound due to the shortage, Chabert said. The current price is just under \$500 a pound.

The head of another truffle sellers association said the problem of truffle theft has been growing.

"In the past month, everyone around here has been robbed," said Michel Meille. "We went to the local officials and the police, but nothing was done."

Meille said thieves have no trouble fencing the stolen tubers. "It's all done under the table," he said. Chabert said his truffle patch is a mile-and-a-half away from the accused farmer's. He inspects it every morning for truffle thieves' telltale footprints, but so far he hasn't caught one. He says he wishes his neighbor had come to him for help. "If we were two or three to watch the truffles there wouldn't be this problem," Chabert said. □

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